

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 SSM-03

AID-05 IO-13 /071 W

-----241636Z 023129 /43

R 241451Z MAY 77

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3222

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USIA WASHDC

DIA WASHDC

/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 3272

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE, PLO

SUBJECT: SYRIA INTENSIVIES ITS DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS WITH
LEBANESE PALESTINIAN FACTIONS

1. SUMMARY: IN APPARENT EFFORT TO FORM MODERATE MUSLIM/
LEFT LEBANESE GROUPING TO DEAL WITH LEBANESE CHRISTIAN RIGHT
AND TO HASTEN ACHIEVEMENT OF FORMULA FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF CAIRO
ACCORD, PRES. AL-ASSAD AND OTHER SENIOR SARG OFFICIALS HAVE
RECEIVED STEADY PROCESSION OF LEBANESE AND PALESTINIAN
LEADERS. MOST INTENSE PERIOD OF SUCH ACTIVITY WAS MAY 19-22
WHEN WALID JUMBLATT, KAMAL SHATILA, AND ABDALLAH YAFI HEADED
DELEGATIONS TO DAMASCUS. DURING SAME PERIOD SALAH KHALAF
AND SEVERAL OTHER FATAH LEADERS MET WITH FONMIN KHADDAM,
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AF COMMANDER JAMIL, AND COS SHIHABI. THESE VISITORS
PRECEDED BY PHALANGE DELEGATION WEEK EARLIER AND MAY 14
MEETING ARAFAT AND NUMBER OF EXCOMM MEMBERS HELD WITH
AL-ASAD. THESE MEETINGS OCCURRED AMIDST INTENSIFIED
CONSULTATIONS AMONG QUADRIPARTITE COMMITTEE TO FIND
SOLUTION FOR CAIRO AGREEMENT IMPASSE. STATEMENTS PRAISING
SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON COMING FROM SHATILA, YAFI, JUMBLATT AND

KHALAF, SUGGEST THAT SYRIA MAKING PROGRESS. MEANWHILE SYRIAN MEDIA HAVE BEEN ALTERNATELY EXPRESSING OPTIMISM OVER ACHIEVEMENT OF FORMULA FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF CAIRO AGREEMENT AND WARNING AGAINST EFFORTS AT PARTITION WHICH SYRIA WOULD OPPOSE "TO THE LAST SYRIAN SOLDIER." SYRIA NOW APPEARS TO BE LOOKING BEYOND CAIRO AGREEMENT ISSUE TO NECESSITY OF CREATING VIABLE LEBANESE MUSLIM/LEFT COALITION WITH WHICH KFUR LEADERS CAN DEAL. WHETHER SYRIAN CAN ACTUALLY OBTAIN GOL-PLO AGREEMENT FOR MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE INTERPRETATION OF CAIRO AGREEMENT WHICH THEN CAN BE SOLD TO KFUR LEADERSHIP REMAINS TO BE SEEN. END SUMMARY.

2. SYRIA IS IN THE PROCESS OF CONDUCTING INTENSIFIED CONTACTS WITH VARIOUS LEBANESE AND PALESTINIAN FACTIONS WHICH APPEAR AIMED AT FORMING LEBANESE MUSLIM/LEFT COALITION AND SECURING LEBANESE/PALESTINIAN CONSENT TO SINGLE FORMULA FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF CAIRO AGREEMENT. FROM MAY 19-22 STEADY PROCESSION OF MUSLIM LEBANESE AND PALESTINIAN LEADERS VISITED DAMASCUS AND HELD HIGH-LEVEL CONTACTS WITH SYRIAN OFFICIALS. THESE VISITS PRECEDED BY VISIT PHALANGE DELEGATION WEEK EARLIER AND MAY 19 ARAFAT-ASSAD MEETING. WALID JUMBLATT LED OFF AT HEAD OF LARGE PSP DELEGATION PROCESSION. HE ARRIVED DAMASCUS MAY 19 AND MET WITH FONMIN KHADDAM AND SENIOR BAATH PARTY OFFICIALS, BEFORE BEING RECEIVED MAY 20 BY AL-ASSAD WHO HAD JUST RETURNED FROM RIYADH. JUMBLATT AFTER THIS MEETING TOLD NEWSMEN THAT THE TALKS HAD GIVEN PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO "UNDERLINING LEBANON'S ARABISM AND SAFEGUARDING ITS UNITY." HE ANNOUNCED AGREEMENT TO FORM CO-ORDINATION COMMITTEE
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BETWEEN PSP AND SYRIA'S BAATH PARTY.

3. AFTER MEETING WITH PSP CONTINGENTS, WHICH HAD OPPOSED SYRIAN INTERVENTION IN LEBANON LAST YEAR. AL-ASSAD MAY 21 RECEIVED ONE OF SYRIA'S LEADING LEBANESE SUPPORTERS, NASSERITE KAMAL SHATILA. SHATILA WELCOMED RESPONSE OF JUMBLATT'S PSP TO SYRIAN INITIATIVE "FOR EXPANDING NATIONAL RECONCILIATION." MOST RECENT OF LEBANESE GROUPS TO CALL ON AL-ASSAD WAS ISLAMIC ALIGNMENT LED BY PRIMIN ABDALLAH AL-YAFI. UPON HIS RETURN TO BEIRUT AL-YAFI REPORTEDLY DECLARED THAT "HE SENSED AL-ASSAD'S OPTIMISM OVER LEBANON'S RETURN TO NORMAL."

4. AMIDST THESE TALKS, KHADDAM MAY 21 ALONG WITH AIR FORCE COMMANDER NAJI JAMIL AND COS HIKMAN SHIHABI MET WITH FATAH LEADERS SALAH KHALAF, ABD AL-JAWAD SALIH, AND MAHMOUD ABBAS. KHALAF WHO FATAH HARDLINER TOWARDS SYRIA'S ROLE IN LEBANON AND ME PEACE EFFORTS, QUOTED IN MAY 23 SYRIAN DESPATCH FROM BEIRUT AS

HAVING TOLD WORLD NEWS AGENCY: "DURING OUR RECENT MEETING WITH AL-ASSAD WE LAID DOWN UNIFIED SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN POLITICAL FOUNDATION, AND I CAN ONLY EMPHASIZE THE DEVOTION AND EFFORT EXERTED BY AL-ASSAD TO REACH JOINT STRATEGY BETWEEN THE RESISTENCE AND SYRIA. I CAN SAY THAT SECONDARY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE AND SYRIA HAVE BEEN TOTALLY ELIMINATED." IN COMMENTING ON LEBANON, KHALAF EXPRESSED PLO'S BACKING FOR "LEBANESE LEGITIMACY REPRESENTED BY SARKIS" AND ACKNOWLEDGED PLO READINESS TO ACCEPT ANY TERRITORY CHOSEN BY LEBANESE GOVERNMENT FOR RELOCATION OF PALESTINIAN CAMPS TO HOUSE THOSE DISPLACED BY THE WAR.

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5. MEANWHILE, SYRIAN MEDIA GAVE PROMINENT ATTENTION THROUGHOUT LAST WEEK TO EFFORTS FOR IMPLEMENTAION OF CAIRO AGREEMENT ALTERNATED WITH WARNINGS AGAINST PARTITION. GENERAL TONE OF REPORTS DEALING WITH CAIRO AGREEMENT AND CONSULTATIONS AMONG QUADRIPARTITE COMMITTEE, PLO, AND LEBANESE AUTHORITIES HAS BEEN OPTIMISTIC. NUMEROUS EDITORIALS AND "SPECIAL REPORTS" FROM BEIRUT HAVE NOTED THAT SOME DIFFERENCES EXIST BUT THAT THEY ARE SOLUBLE. ZUHAYR MUHSIN CLAIMED

AGREEMENT ALREADY 90 PERCENT IMPLEMENTED.

6. ARTICLE IN MAY 23 AL-BAATH REPORTED QUADRIPARTITE COMMITTEE MET UNDER CHAIRMANSHIP SARKIS. ACCORDING TO ARTICLE ONE OF MAIN POINTS OF DISCUSSION WAS HOW PALESTINIAN CAMPS COULD BE PROTECTED FROM ISRAELI
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ATTACKS. EACH MEMBER OF COMMITTEE SAID TO HAVE OUTLINED HIS VIEW BUT ARTICLE NOTED FURTHER CONSULTATIONS NECESSARY TO REACH AGREEMENT. DIFFERENCES IT CLAIMED WERE NOT SERIOUS AND COULD BE RESOLVED. IT SAID COMMITTEE WOULD MEET AGAIN ON WEDNESDAY TO "TAKE STAND ON FUTURE OF HEAVY WEAPONS IN THE CAMPS AND PROTECTION OF THESE CAMPS BY ADF."

7. SAME ARTICLE DISCUSSED VISITS OF LEBANESE GROUPS TO DAMASCUS AND SAID OBSERVERS SAW THESE MEETINGS AS INTENDED TO DRAW ATTENTION OF LEBANESE GROUPS TO IMPORTANCE OF "PREPARATION FOR HOLDING JOINT MEETING (AT A ROUND TABLE?). SYRIA SAID READY TO CONTRIBUTE TO OVERCOMING OBSTACLES WHICH MAY PREVENT SUCH ENCOUNTERS. SOME OBSERVERS CHARACTERIZED POSITIVE ATTITUDES OF VARIOUS GROUPS AFTER THEIR MEETINGS WITH AL-ASSAD AS REFLECTING THEIR DESIRE TO OVERCOME PROBLEMS OF THE PAST AND TO RALLY AROUND POLITICAL, NATIONAL, AND SOCIAL PROGRAM FOR UNIFIED LEBANON. LIST OF PRIORITIES FOR LEBANON SAID TO BE HEADED BY "PRESERVATION OF LEBANON'S UNITY AND ABOLISHMENT OF CONFESSIONALISM."

8. AMID AL-KHULI WRITING IN AL-BAATH MAY 23 PUT SYRIAN EXPECTATIONS FOR LEBANON IN SOMEWHAT STARKER TERMS. HE CLAIMED LARGE MAJORITY OF LEBANESE BACK THE CONCEPT OF UNIFIED LEBANON WITH ARAB AFFILIATION. HE ASSERTED THAT ALL CURRENT PROBLEMS REGARDING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CAIRO AGREEMENT AND SECURITY OF SOUTH LEBANON WOULD BE OVERCOME. HE DECLARED THAT UNIFIED AND INDEPENDENT LEBANON "IS A SYRIAN AND PALESTINIAN DEMAND AS MUCH AS IT IS LEBANESE DEMAND," AND WARNED NO ONE WOULD BE PERMITTED TO STAND IN ITS WAY IN SAME VEIN SYRIAN MININFO AHMAD ISKANDER AHMAD DECLARED MAY 21 IN QATAR THAT SYRIA WILL "FIGHT TO THE LAST SOLDIER TO PREVENT PARTITION."

9. COMMENT: SYRIA APPEARS TO BE LOOKING BEYOND PROBLEM OF IMPLEMENTING CAIRO AGREEMENT, WHICH MEDIA HAVE
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HINTED MAY COME IN STAGES, TO PROJECT OF FORMING MODERATE LEFT/MUSLIM COALITION IN ORDER THAT PHALANGE AND LESS EXTREME KFUR MEMBERS HAVE SOMEONE CREDIBLE WITH WHOM THEY CAN HOLD DIALOGUE. RECENT CLASHES WITH RIGHTIST CHRISTIANS IN BILLA AND ISRAELI ELECTORAL RESULT, MAY HAVE GIVEN SYRIANS ADDED INCENTIVE TO MOVE MATTERS AHEAD IN LEBANON. ANY UNRAVELLING OF EFFORTS TO RESTORE SEMBLANCE OF UNITY AND SOVEREIGNTY TO LEBANON WOULD BE MAJOR POLITICAL SETBACK TO AL-ASSAD WHO NOW HAS 30,000 TROOPS TIED DOWN IN LEBANON WHILE GOLAN FRONT LEFT MORE VULNERABLE.

10. TONE OF MEDIA AND STATEMENTS OF KHALAF AND MUHSIN ON CAIRO ACCORD SUGGEST THAT PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE TOWARD FINDING FORMULA TO REGULATE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN LEBANON. TRIPS BY ARAFAT AND BUTROS TO RIYADH INDICATE BOTH INTENSELY LOBBYING FOR THEIR POSITIONS PRIOR TO REACHING FINAL INTERPRETATION. "AMENDED" PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION BASED UPON THE LEBANESE INTERPRETATION MENTIONED BY ONE EDITORIAL SUGGESTS THAT BASIC PRINCIPLES CONTAINED IN LEBANESE INTERPRETATION ARE FAVORED BY SYRIA BUT SOME LIBERALIZATION OF FORMULAS SUCH AS TIMING OF IMPLEMENTATION AND NUMBER ARMED MEN PER THOUSAND CAMP INHABITANTS MAY TAKE PLACE TO MAKE THEM PALATABLE TO FEDAYEEN. WHETHER SARG CAN OBTAIN ACQUIESCENCE OF KFUR FRONT LEADERS IN THE LATEST EFFORT TO IMPLEMENT CAIRO ACCORDS REMAINS UNCLEAR.
MURPHY

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